

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Tempe, Arizona
The Transfiguration of our Lord / The final Sunday of the church year
March 2, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
God's glory is revealed in unexpected places

⁷If the ministry that brought death (which was engraved in letters on stone) came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look directly at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (though it was fading), ⁸how will the ministry of the spirit not be much more glorious? ⁹For if the ministry that brought condemnation has glory, the ministry that brought righteousness has even more glory. ¹⁰In fact, in this case, what was glorious is no longer very glorious, because of the greater glory of that which surpasses it. ¹¹Indeed, if what is fading away was glorious, how much more glorious is that which is permanent! ¹²Therefore, since we have this kind of hope, we act with great boldness. ¹³We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites could not continue to look at the end of the radiance, as it was fading away. ¹⁴In spite of this, their minds were hardened. Yes, up to the present day, the same veil remains when the Old Testament is read. It has not been removed because it is taken away only in Christ. ¹⁵Instead, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸But all of us who reflect the Lord's glory with an unveiled face are being transformed into his own image, from one degree of glory to another. This too is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
– 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 EHV

Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine that you are experiencing the glory of our God. Where are you and what do you see with your mind's eye? Maybe you are standing out at a ranch in rural Arizona looking at the night sky. There in your mind, you think of Psalm 19 which says, "The heavens tell about the glory of God. The expanse of the sky proclaims the work of his hands." (Psalm 19:1). Perhaps you are at the top of the Superstitions looking at the world below.

Maybe you think of biblical demonstrations of God's power and might. Are you standing with Lot as you see Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed? Are you watching the walls of Jericho fall?

Perhaps these biblical examples are not what comes to mind. Maybe you are standing in awe at a beautiful cathedral like Notre Dame. Maybe you are looking at a stadium filled with people ready to hear the televangelist preach. What do you imagine when you consider the glory of God?

Although we find ourselves on Transfiguration Sunday, the day in which we see that Jesus revealed his full glory to a few of his disciples, we recognize that this is not the typical experience of believers. We do not have the privilege of joining Peter, James, and John at the mount. Yet, that does not mean we can't experience the glory of God. In the second reading for today, we learn that our experience of God's glory might be different than we expect, yet it is far greater than we could imagine.

God's glory is revealed in unexpected places. God's glory is revealed in the gospel ministry. God's glory is reflected in his people.

Today's reading comes from Paul's second epistle to the believers in Corinth. In the first part of this letter, Paul had an important message regarding the gospel ministry for these believers. Paul wasn't able to visit Corinth as he desired, so he wrote this letter. Sadly, some people questioned Paul's ministry in connection to this. In this letter, Paul defended his ministry because it is a gospel ministry. He then spoke about the glory that God revealed in the gospel. Paul didn't need a letter of commendation from anyone because he was a minister of the gospel.

Paul's defense of his ministry was that his ministry was one of the gospel. God revealed his glory in unexpected places from a human standpoint. God's glory was revealed in the gospel ministry. Paul's ultimate goal in this section was to demonstrate to the believers in Corinth that the message of salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection is the greatest revelation of God's glory. He did this first by contrasting the glory that God revealed in the past with the glory that God revealed in Christ.

In the first lesson from today's service, we saw that after Moses saw the Lord his face would shine with the radiance of the glory of the LORD. This glory however needed to be veiled. The people of Israel could not handle to see the glory of the LORD in this way. Also, the glory that radiated from Moses' face would fade.

The glory that is revealed in the gospel ministry, according to Paul, is greater. This was for the following reasons: 1. The gospel ministry leads to life, not death. 2. The glory that comes through the gospel ministry does not fade.

The ministry of death that was transcribed on stone tablets is that of the law that was given through Moses. This was not an eternal covenant. Instead, this was a covenant that lasted for a time and a purpose. No one could live by the law forever. The people of Israel would constantly fail to uphold this covenant. They couldn't fulfill the law.

The ministry of the gospel is one of glory though. Jesus took away the veil. Jesus fulfilled the law of the covenant. Jesus gave life that lasts. The glory that is revealed in the ministry of the gospel is permanent.

Paul directed the Corinthian Christians to look at the ministry of the gospel to see the glory of the LORD. This may be an unexpected place for many to look and consider. When I asked you to imagine God's glory did you think of the events of Jesus' life? Did you think of a baby born in a humble stall? Did you think of a Nazarene living a normal life learning about carpentry, doing his chores, and attending the synagogue? Did you think of the events of Holy Week that will be considered in Lent? Did you think of an innocent man being beaten? Did you think about that same man mocked on trial? Did you think about that man hanging on a cross dying between two criminals? Paul directed the Corinthian believers to the ministry of this message of this gospel to see the greatest revelation of God's glory. God's glory was revealed in unexpected places; it is revealed in the gospel ministry.

This place may seem unexpected to the human mind, but that is because this truth is veiled to those who are apart from Christ. This veil however is removed by Christ. The glory of God is seen in the eternal salvation that comes in Jesus. In Jesus, believers are given a sure hope. In Jesus, believers are given boldness. In Jesus, believers are set free. This gospel ministry is the ministry of life. This gospel ministry is the greater revelation of God's glory.

The gospel ministry may not look like a revelation of God's glory to us. People might think, "that was just a man who went to die on a cross." People might think, "that is just a pastor speaking some words." People might think, "that is just water poured on a person's head." People might think, "that is just bread and wine given to eat." Yet, this is the powerful gospel of our Lord. This is as it is written, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16a) The gospel ministry is the power of God. God's glory is revealed in unexpected ways.

Brothers and sisters, do you yearn to experience God's glory in "greater" ways? In so doing have you become ashamed of the gospel? How could you be ashamed of the gospel? Let's think of several ways in which we could do this. Maybe your gauge for the quality of a church or Christian school is off. Your first question isn't whether or not the gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered faithfully. Maybe you look at the size of the programs and buildings.

Perhaps you are ashamed of the gospel in that you don't understand how powerful it is. You dismiss opportunities to invite your friends and family to worship thinking things like: I don't know what to say when this person asks such questions. This neighbor would never come to believe in Jesus. Does my church have the right programs to keep this family coming?

Maybe you show that you are ashamed of the gospel in what you expect it to do in your life. Time and time again, you beat yourself up with the law when looking to live a better Christian life. You are looking for that which leads to death to give you life.

Let us not be ashamed of the gospel. The gospel is the greatest revelation of God's glory. Although God's glory is revealed in unexpected places. This is what we need for freedom. We need the ministry of the gospel. Therefore, receive this gospel. It is glorious. Jesus of Nazareth lived for you and he died for you. On the cross, he took on the punishment of your sins so that you may be set free. Then, he rose triumphantly from the grave. Now you get to experience God's glory through how this gospel is delivered to you. A father reading the Bible to his family. Glorious. A pastor pouring water on a little girl's head. Glorious. Eating a little piece of bread and drinking a little bit of wine. Glorious. God's glory is revealed in some unexpected place. It is revealed in this gospel ministry.

The gospel ministry is how the glorious God gives boldness and freedom to his people. This is also how he turns them to him and gives them his Spirit. Where the Spirit works, there is freedom. Those who have freedom and unity with God in this way, reflect the radiance of God's glory in their lives. Those who have received Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit in this gospel ministry are being transformed. They are sanctified. They are made to be the image of our loving God, which is glorious. Then in this life of union with God, they grow in the degree of demonstrating this glory in their lives. As Paul wrote at the end of this reading, God's glory is revealed in unexpected places. It is reflected in his people.

Interestingly, Moses saw God and reflected his glory. Yet, the glory faded and needed to be veiled. Those who have the Holy Spirit in connection to Jesus reflect the glory of God, yet this glory does not fade and it does not need to be veiled.

Our world's perception of things may not align with what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians. Would people look at the everyday vocational good works of a Christian and call that glorious? A mother changing her baby's diaper; is that glorious? A Father playing dolls with his daughter; is that glorious? A student studying for a test; is that glorious? God's glory is revealed in unexpected places. It is reflected in his people.

Do you look at your everyday actions as opportunities to reflect the glory of the Lord that has shined up on you? I often do not. When I am exhausted from work... when I am tired of the tantrums and constant questions... when I am sick of the needed repairs around the house, it is hard to think of these things as glorious. This however is short-sighted. I often think of these things as anything but glorious. Maybe you are there with me.

I think a life reflecting God's glory is seen in preaching to packed churches, not empty pews. I think a life reflecting God's glory is seen in mission journeys, not serving my neighbors and family. I think a life reflecting God's glory is seen in worldly success, not utter normalcy. This mindset comes from the world which sees God's glory as veiled. God has revealed something greater to us.

Brothers and sisters, do not downplay your daily opportunities to reveal God's glory. When you serve your family, co-workers, and neighbors faithfully moved by the gospel ministry, you are a testimony to the fact that you are freed by the Spirit. You demonstrate that it is not by works of the law that you are saved. You shine to the world around you that Jesus is your Lord, and you want to serve him in

anything. Perhaps, the world around you will even ask you for the reason for that hope that is in you as they see your works of service to God and others. You can then share with them the powerful gospel that changes your life for now and eternity. God's glory is revealed in unexpected places. It is reflected in his people.

Do you want to see the glory of our God? Although it is veiled to the world, it is revealed to you. God's glory is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God's glory is seen in the preaching of his Word and the administration of the sacraments. God's glory then is reflected every day by his people. Amen.